

U.S. Department of Justice**Civil Rights Division**

Restoring Your Right to Vote Washington

Issued December, 2000

The right to vote is an important civil right in a democracy as well as a civic responsibility, and yet many persons who have been convicted of a crime do not know whether they are eligible to vote. For both federal and state elections, the right to vote is controlled by the law of the state in which you live. Some states restrict the right to vote for persons who have been convicted of a crime. This pamphlet is intended to help you determine whether you are eligible to vote in the state in which you live, and if so, what steps you must take to be permitted to vote.

What law governs whether my felony conviction limits my right to vote?

The impact of a criminal conviction on the right to vote varies widely from state to state. Whether you can vote after being convicted of a crime is determined by the state in which you live, not the state in which you were convicted.

Can I vote while I'm incarcerated in Washington?

If you are a resident of Washington, and you have been convicted of a felony, you cannot vote while you are incarcerated. When you are convicted of a felony, whether in state or federal court, your voter registration is cancelled.

If you are a resident of another state who is temporarily incarcerated in Washington, you may be able to vote by absentee ballot in your home state. You need to consult the law of your home state regarding both criminal convictions and absentee ballots to see if this is a possibility.

I have been released from incarceration. How do I restore my right to vote?

In order to regain the right to vote, you must have your civil rights restored.

Your civil rights are restored by the issuance of a certificate of discharge. When you have completed all of the requirements of your sentence, the Department of Corrections notifies the sentencing court. The sentencing court then issues and provides you with a certificate of discharge, which will have the effect of restoring your right to vote. You can then register to vote.

However, if you were convicted for a state crime committed on or before July 1, 1984, you must follow a different procedure. If you have been released on parole, you may be able to obtain an order of

discharge from the Indeterminate Sentence Review Board. The telephone number for the Indeterminate Sentence Review Board is (360) 493-9266. If you finished serving a suspended sentence or period of probation, you may apply to the sentencing court to have your civil rights restored.

Also, if you were convicted under state law, whether before or after July 1, 1984, you may apply to the Clemency and Pardons Board for a pardon or to have your civil rights restored. You can contact the Clemency and Pardons Board by contacting the Governor's office:

Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002
(360) 902-4111 (voice)
(360) 753-4110 (fax)
(360) 753-6466 (TTY/TDD)

What if my conviction was for a federal crime?

If you are convicted of a federal felony, you lose the right to vote in Washington until you have had your civil rights restored. Although the Governor of Washington cannot grant you a pardon for a federal conviction, the Clemency and Pardons Board can restore your civil rights in Washington. You may petition the Clemency and Pardons Board, which has the authority to restore the right to vote to anyone convicted in federal court, by contacting the Governor's office.

What if I was convicted in another state?

If you are convicted of a felony in another state, you lose the right to vote in Washington. Although the Governor of Washington cannot grant you a pardon for a conviction in another state, the Clemency and Pardons Board can restore your civil rights in Washington. You may petition the Clemency and Pardons Board, which has the authority to restore the right to vote to anyone convicted in another state, by contacting the Governor's office.

What happens if I move to another state?

If you move to another state, your right to vote will be controlled by the laws of that state.

What are Washington's other voter registration requirements?

To vote in Washington, you must be a citizen of the United States, a legal resident of Washington, and at least 18 years old by the date of the election.

When do I need to register to vote?

To be eligible to vote in an upcoming election, you must register at least 30 days prior to the election. If you register by mail, your application must be postmarked by the 30-day cutoff. If you fail to meet the 30-day deadline, you may register in person at your county elections department no later than 15 days before the election.

Where do I go to register?

Registration is available at many places in Washington, including:

- in person at your county auditor or elections department
- when you renew or apply for your driver's license
- by mail, with voter registration forms that are available at many public libraries, schools, and other government offices
- by accessing a registration application on-line at www.vote.wa.gov

Registration may also be available at other state service agencies. Contact the county auditor's office near you to find out which service agencies provide voter registration. If you are in King County, you should contact the Department of Records and Elections.

If you believe you are eligible to vote and encounter difficulty registering, please contact the Elections section of the Washington Secretary of State:

Office of the Secretary of State
Elections Division
Legislative Building
PO Box 40220
Olympia, Washington 98504-0220
(360) 902-4151
(800) 448-4881 (toll-free voter hotline)
(800-422-8683) (TDD)
e-mail: elections@secstate.wa.gov

If the Washington Secretary of State is unable to help you, or to report a problem, contact:

U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Voting Section, Rm. 7254 - NWB
Washington, D.C. 20530
(202) 307-2767 (voice)
(800) 253-3931 (toll-free)
(202) 307-3961 (fax)
www.usdoj.gov/crt

This pamphlet is provided for informational purposes only, as an aid to further inquiry. The laws in many states are revised frequently, and may have changed since this pamphlet was issued. It is your responsibility to determine whether you are lawfully eligible to vote, and criminal penalties can result from voting when ineligible or making false statements on a registration form.